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The Wheels of Time

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By

Florence L. Barclay

Author of "The Rosary" and "The Mistress of Shenstone"

ILLUSTRATED BY R. G. VOSBURGH

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To one woman who said
"I go not," but after-
wards repented and went

Illustrations

"Flower," he said, "my lovely fragrant Flower!". . . . . *Cover*

OPP. PAGE

"Good old Jane," she said. "I do enjoy talking to you" 38

"You are not much use at answering questions, darling, are you?" . . . 72

"Oh, Flower! *You cared like this?*" . 92

The Wheels of Time

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THE doctor stood, with his hand on the doorknob, and gave a final look back into his wife's boudoir.

There was nothing in that room suggestive of town or of town life and work—delicate green and white, a mossy carpet, masses of spring flowers; cool, soft, noiseless, fragrant.

Standing in the doorway the doctor could hear the agitated clang of the street-door bell, Stoddart crossing the hall; the opening and closing of the door, and Stoddart's subdued and sympathetic voice saying: "Step this way, please." A heavy, depressed foot or an anxious, hurried one, ac-

cording to the mental condition of its owner, obeyed; and the shutting of the library door meant another patient added to the number of those who were already listlessly turning over the pages of bound volumes of *Punch* or scrutinizing with unseeing eyes the Landseer engraving over the mantelpiece.

In former days the waiting-room used to be the doctor's dining-room, but before he married his pretty wife she put her foot down firmly on this question. He had been explaining the Wimpole Street house and its arrangements as they stood together in her sunny rose-garden.

"But, Deryck," she had exclaimed in dismay, waving her hands at him, full of a great mass of freshly gathered roses, "I could not *possibly* sit

down and dine with you in a room where your horrible patients have sat waiting for hours, leaving behind them the germs of all their nasty, infectious diseases!"

The doctor caught the little hands, roses and all, and held them against his breast, looking down into her face with laughing eyes.

"Flower," he said, "my lovely, fragrant Flower! Am I doing a foolish thing in attempting to transplant you into the soil of busy London life? Should I not do better if I left you in your rose-garden? Ah, well, it is too late to ask that now; I can't leave Wimpole Street, and"—his voice, always deep, suddenly thrilled to a deeper depth; a tenderness of strong passion quivered in it—"I can't live without you." He let go her hands

and framed her upturned face in his strong, brown fingers.

"What have you done to me, Flower? I was always self-contained and self-sufficing, and now I find I can't live without you, Flower—*my* Flower."

His eyes glowed down into her face. She looked up sweetly at him.

"But, Deryck," she said, "they *do* leave the germs of all their nasty infectious—"

The doctor's hands fell suddenly to his sides.

"My dear child," he said, and his voice instantly regained its usual evenness of tone, "have I not told you that I am a mind specialist? The people who come to my consulting-room are not, as a rule, suffering from measles, scarlet fever, or smallpox!"

"Oh, well, they leave their dreadful morbid thoughts behind them; and that is worse. I could not dine in a room where diseased minds have sat for hours, brooding. It would give me creeps. And oh, Deryck, you know that stupid article you read me the other day, about how mental impressions, when a mind was highly strung or unbalanced, could leave an impress upon walls or furniture—explaining ghost stories, you know?—I forget who wrote it. . . . You did? My dear boy, how clever of you! . . . Oh, no! How can you say I called it 'stupid'? Or if I did, I meant 'interesting,' of course. See how well I remembered it, though you thought I was not listening, because I had to keep counting the stitches in the heels of your golf stockings, you ungrateful

man! And I am certain you are right about horrible thoughts sticking to furniture. And however well Stoddart arranged the room he couldn't sweep them away, and we should sit at dinner surrounded by them—oh, Deryck, *surrounded!*"

Her lovely eyes looked widely at him, over the gathered roses.

The doctor laughed. It is so easy for a man to laugh before marriage.

"All right, Flower," he said. "There is nothing like convincing a fellow with his own arguments. We will remodel the house. I'll talk it over with Hunt. You shall have dining-room, drawing-room, and boudoir, all on the first floor, and I and my freaks will have the run of the ground floor. You will need only to pass

through the hall to go in and out of the house. So, if they drop their poor minds about, you will not come across them. Now, choose me that promised buttonhole, and then let us come down to the stream. I don't like a rose-garden when half of the windows of the house overlook it!"

This was seven years ago, and it now sometimes seemed to Dr. Brand as if his tall Wimpole Street house represented in its stories the various portions of the human anatomy; absolutely distinct in themselves, but held together and kept going by the brain; the ever-busy brain controlling all.

His wife's apartments on the first floor; his life with her there, into which his professional interests were so rarely allowed to intrude; certainly they represented the *heart* of things;

the man's whole heart rested and centred there.

The floor above was given up to the nurseries, and there, already, two pairs of little feet pattered ceaselessly, and merry voices shouted clear and gleeful, and a little flower-faced girl peeped down at him through the balustrade, and a small boy, gazing earnestly with dark, steadfast eyes into the interior of a jumping rabbit which refused to jump, reproduced absurdly his own intent professional manner.

In the basement were the kitchens, and he was as ignorant of them as, he reflected with a smile, every perfectly healthy man should be of the digestive organs of his own anatomy.

Then on the ground floor, between the life below-stairs and the life above, but generating the needful supplies

to keep the whole establishment going, dwelt the Brain—*his* brain, his untiring, ever-growing capacity for hard work, represented by his consulting-room, where so many strenuous hours were spent, and the old dining-room, now called the library, where an ever-increasing number of patients waited daily. This floor of his life was practically unshared by any, excepting the faithful and punctilious old butler, whose monotonous "Step this way, sir," "Please to step this way, ma'am," served to punctuate the departure of one case and the arrival of the next.

Sometimes the desire to share the interest of this ever-varying daily work with another, gripped him in the throes of its human necessity. When his deep, penetrating eyes had been long bent upon the shifting, shuffling

mind of a patient, at last piercing with tender mercilessness to the very core of that mind's malady; when his quick brain had grasped the case in all its bearings, and his magnificent will-power had compelled the shaken soul to see things as he saw them, to believe things as he believed them, to face the future as the future alone could rightly be faced; when his inspiring enthusiasm and belief in God and life and human nature had set that mental cripple on his feet or loosed the bands which had bound some poor "daughter of Abraham,—lo, these eighteen years"; when, conducted by Stoddart's mechanical "Step this way," they passed out from his consulting-room to tread with new hopes the path of a new life, he would stride to his window, squaring his shoulders, and tak-

ing in a deep breath of fresh air, he would say: "God, what a victory! I must tell Flower."

But once in Flower's boudoir, with a dainty china teacup in his hand and a muffin on his knee, hearing the blissful details of Blossom's new syllable, or Dicky's latest development, or Flower's own triumphal progress through the Park in the new motor-car, somehow the story of the strenuous fight, the hopeful victory, seemed out of place. This was the home of *feeling; thought* must not intrude. This was the domain of trivialities; the great issues of life must hide in the background. This was the home of the Heart; the Brain must abide below.

Yet matrimony and motherhood had done much to deepen Flower. The

linking with his nature; the having perforce to awaken in order to meet and satisfy the deep needs of his overmastering love; the constant example of his unselfish nobility, singleness of purpose, and high ideal of life; and, above all, the pangs and joys of motherhood; all these had made of the wilful, wayward little Flower of the rose-garden, a sweet and gracious woman; in outward face and form more exquisite than ever, and in the hidden part an awakening soul, which needed only an hour of deep agony, a tearing away of the flimsy veil of selfishness and conventionality now stifling it, to bring it to the birth.

But that time of pain and stress came not to Flower, because the strong, shielding love of a man was always around her, and his care warded off

the very thing which alone could have brought about his comfort and her completion. And yet he was dimly conscious of a gradual growth in her, and sometimes, half wistfully, he called her "Mary," that name so sacred to perfect motherhood, and which had seemed such an incongruous gift from her sponsors, to his Flower of the rose-garden.

* * * * *

On this particular morning, when the doctor stood at the door looking into the boudoir, Flower was bending over a huge bowl of daffodils, arranging each golden trumpet to her liking.

The spring sunshine came glancing through the window and touched her hair to the gold of the blossoms. The doctor noted this, and a sudden look

of adoration softened the cool clearness of his eyes.

The baby's godmother, on this last day of her visit, sitting by the fire with her feet on the fender, opening and smoothing a copy of the *Times,* glanced up, past the sunshine and the daffodils, saw that look and promptly retired behind a leading article.

The baby's godmother was a perfectly beautiful woman in an absolutely plain shell, but, unfortunately, no man had yet looked beneath the shell and seen the woman herself in her perfection. She would have made earth heaven for a blind lover who, not having eyes for the plainness of her face or the massiveness of her figure, might have drawn nearer and apprehended the wonder of her as a woman; experiencing the wealth of tenderness

of which she was capable, the blessed comfort of the shelter of her love, the perfect comprehension of her sympathy, the marvellous joy of winning and wedding her. But as yet no blind man with far-seeing vision had come her way, and it always seemed to be her lot to take a second place on occasions when she would have filled the first to infinite perfection.

She had been bridesmaid at the doctor's wedding, to whom she would have made a wife such as Flower, develop as she might, could never be. She was godmother to the baby—she whose arms ached for motherhood itself and whose motherliness would have been a thing for men to kneel down and worship. She found her duties as godmother to various babies consisted chiefly in praying that the

foolish mistakes made by their parents might be overruled by an all-wise Providence and work out somehow to their ultimate good.

She had a glorious voice; but her face, not matching it, its existence was rarely suspected; and as she accompanied to perfection, she was usually in requisition to play for the singing of others. Only once, at a concert, where the principal songstress failed at the last moment, she volunteered to fill the empty place, and walked to the piano, when the moment came, in the double capacity of singer and accompanist. How she "brought down the house" on this occasion, and how a blind man's eyes were opened, belongs to another story.

Meanwhile she was a woman of tact, and when she perceived how the doctor

was momentarily dazzled by the sunlight and the gold, she retired, obviously, behind the *Times* leader.

"Darling," said the doctor, "I am wired for to Brighton, in consultation over a very important case. I must go down by an afternoon train, and I doubt if I can get back to-night."

"How tiresome, Deryck! It is Myra's reception this evening, and I promised to bring you with me. I shall hate going alone. However, I suppose it cannot be helped. Did you ever see such daffodils? It makes one long to be back in the woods at home."

The doctor hesitated. Downstairs the bell rang again, the hall door opened and closed, Stoddart said, "Step this way, sir."

"Flower," said the doctor, "I have

a jolly little plan for to-night. I want you to come to Brighton with me. We will put up at the Metropole and have a real good time. I ought to be able to get back to you there soon after seven, and we can have dinner and go on the pier afterwards and watch the moonlight on the sea. Or, if you prefer something more lively, there is a good concert on in the Dome. I will telephone for seats. It is a long while since we heard any music together."

He stopped rather breathlessly.

The front doorbell rang again.

The doctor's wife took out a daffodil and replaced it to better advantage. Then she looked up with an exquisite smile.

"Dearest, you are so amusing with your sudden plans! It sounds delightful, of course. I love Brighton in

spring. I shall never forget driving along the King's Road in the sunshine, with a huge bunch of violets on my muff. It was too heavenly! Early March, and the whole place seemed to sing of how summer was coming! But we cannot always do what we like. I *must* look in at Myra's party, and I should really have thought you might have got back in time. If you appeared at eleven, it would do."

The doctor's face, against the pale green woodwork of the door, suddenly looked rather worn and thin.

"I am afraid I could not get back, Flower," he said. "I may have to put in a second visit in the morning. And —darling—I want you to-night. This case will be rather a strain. It will be just everything to have you down there to come back to. The moment

it is over I shall remember you are waiting for me."

The baby's godmother looked up quietly over the *Times*. She had heard the tone in his voice and she saw on his face just what she expected to see. Notwithstanding his forty years, despite his brilliant powers, his ceaseless energy, he looked at that minute like a tired child, just needing to be gathered into a loving woman's arms and hushed to rest. He was facing, beforehand, what he would be feeling after the strain was over. He was yearning for the love and companionship, dreading the solitude and loneliness. The baby's godmother knew exactly what he needed. She awaited Flower's reply.

"Who is 'the case,' Deryck?"

The doctor hesitated an instant,

then named a name so widely known that the baby's godmother bounded in her chair.

"My dear Deryck," she cried, "if you are successful there, it means fame —world wide! Oh, what can we do to help? Must you see patients this morning?"

The doctor smiled.

"I must, Jeanette, unless you will see them for me. But work fits me for work. It is only after it is all over one feels a bit tired sometimes." He looked at Flower. "Well, sweet? Can you be ready at two o'clock sharp?"

"Dear," she said, "I am *so* sorry, but I can't see my way clear about going with you to-day. If only it had been to-morrow! Nurse has asked to go out to tea and to stay the evening, and I promised to have the children

down longer than usual. Of course there *is* Emma, and Marsdon could help. But I should not feel easy about it. And I promised Dicky and Blossom we would have all the stuffed animals out and play menagerie. I never *can* feel it right to disappoint little children. And you know you often say to me yourself, 'If you have promised them a thing, keep to it at all costs.' Besides, there *is* Myra's tiresome 'at home' to consider. Really, Deryck, I don't see how I can be away to-day."

"All right, Flower," the doctor said quietly. "I am sorry I bothered you by proposing it. Don't expect me up to lunch. Every moment will be full this morning. Stoddart will put some sandwiches in my bag. Good-bye."

The door closed behind him. They

heard his quick step on the stairs and the consulting-room door shut sharply.

The baby's godmother laid down the *Times,* folded her skirt back over her knees, and stirred the fire with her shoe.

Flower sighed.

"Deryck really *is* trying," she said.

The baby's godmother bit her lip. She had found that she could help the doctor's wife best by never contradicting her.

"Very clever people usually are trying," she remarked after a pause, "to those who have to live with them."

Flower wheeled round and looked at her.

"My good Jane, I don't know what you mean! Deryck is perfect to live with, *perfect*! Have you stayed here ten days without finding that out? He

is only trying when he swoops down upon me with a sudden plan and expects me to be ready to rush away with him at a moment's notice. If he had let me know yesterday it might have been managed."

"I gathered he only knew himself this morning."

"That has nothing whatever to do with it. The crux of the whole matter is that *I* had promised *nurse* she should have the evening, and I cannot leave the children, with nurse away."

The baby's godmother bent over the grate, took up the poker, and carefully built a little castle of molten coal in the very heart of the bright fire. Her hands looked strong and firm and very capable. Her face flushed as she bent over the glowing flame.

The doctor's wife, cool and dainty,

put masses of early white lilac into a tall crystal vase.

Silence reigned.

The clock struck eleven.

Then the baby's godmother laid down the fire-iron and began to speak, her hands clasped firmly around her large knees.

"Flower, when a man such as your husband wants you, you should leave everything—*everything*—to go to him. What are social engagements and servants' plans, ay, even children, compared with the needs of such a man as Deryck? Oh, my dear, couldn't you hear the appeal in his voice? It was like the cry of a tired child in the dark, groping for its resting-place, which just wants lifting up into its mother's arms and hushing to sleep. Strong man though he is—and I suppose you

and I can hardly realize how strong he is when coping with the great needs of others—he will always be a boy where he loves. He is so young in heart, so eternally, passionately young. He wants mothering just now. He is doing the work of three men, and doing it at high pressure. I hear of it from outside, as perhaps you cannot. And when the day is over he needs a place of rest—a tender, understanding place of rest, where he can talk or be silent, sleep or wake, as the fancy takes him, but where he will never be left alone to live again through the happenings of the day, too tired to escape them. And oh, Flower, you, and you alone, can do this for him. Shall I tell you? I know half-a-dozen women at least who would throw over social engagements, leave husbands, children, every-

thing, and go down to stay at Brighton or anywhere else on the chance of five minutes' conversation with Deryck, or of his needing, at the moment, a comrade and friend."

"Horrid creatures!" cried Flower, mockingly, "their husbands ought to have something to say to them for running after mine. I wonder a proper person like you, Jane, is not ashamed to talk of them. And you need not try to make me jealous. It is one of my theories that only small minds are jealous. I have always stood far above the feeling."

"I know, dear, I know," said the baby's godmother, hastily. "I had not the faintest hope of making you jealous. Besides, why should you be? Deryck has never looked twice at any woman but you. We all know that."

Flower laid down her scissors and came and knelt on the hearthrug, mollified and a little wistful. She spread out her damp hands to the blaze and looked up into the baby's godmother's plain face, with a mischievous, inquisitive smile.

"Do you know, Jane," she said, "I have sometimes wondered—you seem to know each other so intimately—whether in the long-ago days, before he met me, Deryck ever proposed to you?"

The baby's godmother laughed, and again stirred the fire with her toe.

"Well, my dear, you may rest assured he never did so, for the most conclusive of all reasons,—I should not have refused him."

Flower laughed gaily.

"Good old Jane," she said. "I do

"GOOD OLD JANE," SHE SAID. "I DO ENJOY TALKING TO YOU."

enjoy talking to you, you are so deliciously unconventional." Then more soberly, " It is not fair that you should think I do not take proper care of Deryck and do not suffer during his absences. I go through perfect agonies of mind during the long hours of the night, when he is tearing down from Scotland by the mail train. I keep waking and thinking how bumpy it must be to lie along the seat of a railway carriage. He never will take a sleeper. And I lie and think of all the signal-men who hold his life in their hands, and hope they don't drink." Flower's voice trembled with emotion. " After reading about all those fearful railway smashes lately, I wrote on one of his visiting cards: *In case of accident, wire at once to Mrs. Deryck Brand, Wimpole Street, London, W.*

I put it into his pocketbook, and it comforts me to know it is always upon him."

The lovely eyes of the doctor's wife were wet. Her lashes glistened in the firelight. The baby's godmother stooped and took up the poker, then laid it down again, unused.

"Well, Flower," she said at length, very deliberately, "and suppose an accident happened and they wired to you? What would you do?"

"Do?" exclaimed the doctor's wife, her lovely eyes dilating. "Why, go to him, of course!"

"But suppose nurse happened to be out? Or you had people coming to tea? Or you had promised the children—"

"Jane, Jane, how odious you are! none of those things would matter, of

course. If he were hurt or ill, nothing could keep me from his side. I should not even stop to pack. I should fly . . . What? . . . Well, I might let Marsdon pack a handbag, but I should certainly catch the first possible train."

The baby's godmother stooped for the poker once more and this time she assaulted the dying embers vigorously, remarking in a muffled voice: "Yes, I think a handbag would be wise. Decidedly, I would have Marsdon and a handbag in the programme." Then, suddenly dropping the poker with a clatter, she caught Flower's fluttering hands in hers and held them firmly, looking searchingly into her upturned face.

"Ah, child, child! You remind me of the story of a white rose-tree. Sit

down for five minutes while I tell it to you.

"Two friends of mine have a lovely little place in Hertfordshire. She—Sybel—takes a great delight in her garden, particularly in growing roses. They had one tiny girl of four years old, rightly named Angela—the sweetest little angel-child I ever beheld. I ran down to them for one night last June. Sybel and I were having tea in the garden, close to a magnificent white rose-tree, a mass of fragrant bud and blossom. Sybel was very proud of it. Presently we heard little dancing feet down the gravel path behind us, and the baby-girl appeared. She stood gravely contemplating us at tea, not asking for anything. Sybel is a great disciplinarian. Suddenly the baby eyes fell upon the rose-tree, and a

wistful look of longing passed into them. She drew close to Sybel and looked pleadingly up into her face. 'Oh, mummie, they are *so* lubly! May I pick one of your roses?' 'Certainly not,' said Sybel. 'How often am I to tell you, baby, that you are never to pick flowers in the garden! Run along to nurse, and don't be troublesome.'

"The baby said no more, but I saw the little mouth droop and quiver. The small feet trailed slowly away over the grass, all the dance gone out of them, and Sybel gave me a long dissertation on the bringing up of children and the importance of checking their natural tendency to destructiveness, my only reply being, I am afraid, 'What on earth is the good of a garden full of flowers if your own baby can't gather and enjoy them!' To

which Sybel made answer: 'It is just as well, my dear Jane, that you remain unmarried. You would hopelessly spoil your children if you had any.'

"With that we laughed and ceased sparring; for Sybel is a good sort and was a devoted mother, provided her little child pleased her in all things."

The baby's godmother paused a moment, as if mentally reviewing a scene and seeking for words in which to describe it. Then she leaned forward, with her arms upon her knees and her hands clasped in front of her, and as she spoke, slowly and quietly, she kept her eyes fixed upon those firmly folded hands.

"Three weeks later I was wired for, to go back there and comfort a despairing, childless mother.

"When poor Sybel took me up to see the little body, it lay upon the bed, smothered in white roses—roses in the little hands, roses round the tiny feet, snowy petals framing the baby face, now whiter than the whitest rose. When I saw them, and when poor Sybel fell on her knees at the foot of the little bed and moaned in anguish of heart, I knew why she had sent for me.

"'Oh, Jane,' she said, 'Jane! You remember. She wanted *one* white rose, *just one,* and I would not let her have it. Oh, my baby, my baby!'

"'Sybel, dear,' I said helplessly, 'she has them all now.'

"'*Now!*' cried Sybel, in the most fearful accents of despair. 'What good is it *now?* Ten thousand roses

strewn about her now are not worth the one gathered by her own little hand when she wanted it, which would have given her pleasure *then*. Too late! Too late! Oh, God, the wheels of time! Will they never move backward? Shall I never hear again my baby's voice saying, "Mummie, may I pick one of your roses?" Oh, baby, speak to poor mummie and say you know you may have them all!'

"But the little angel-face was calmly unresponsive, and the tiny marble hands so lightly clasped the rose stems that when the mother's desperate weeping shook the bed, the roses those baby hands seemed holding, dropped from them and fell, unheeded.

"Ah, poor breaking heart! Love's offering came too late."

The baby's godmother still kept her

eyes on her folded hands. The doctor's wife was crying softly.

"Oh, Flower," the deep, sad voice went on, "we are all apt to make the same terrible mistake. When our dear ones have passed beyond all ken of earthly pleasures, we send our costly wreaths of rarest flowers, striving thus to atone for having denied them the one simple blossom which was all they asked and needed. Let us learn to give our flowers now—now while they can hold them and have them; now, while they can scent their perfume and enjoy their beauty. Oh, child, give Deryck his white rose while he asks it of you. A man requires the instant fulfilment of his heart's desires. We women can wait. Some of us enjoy the idea of waiting even for the wreaths and crosses, though we shall not be there

to see them. The morbid picturesqueness of the idea appeals to us; but a man wants nothing for his cold clay save six feet of honest earth. His needs are stronger, simpler, more intense than ours. And what he needs, he needs now. When the battle is over and won, he will leave the old suit of armor behind and forge ahead to pastures new. Stand by him now, in the din, the dust, and the heat, with the cup of cold water he craves. And oh, remember, the wheels of time go forward, always; backward, never. I want you to be spared the agony of vain regret."

The baby's godmother ceased speaking and looked up. The lines were hard and stern about her mouth and eyes, but the eyes themselves were soft and infinitely tender.

Flower rose and, stooping, kissed her gently.

"I wish he *had* proposed to you," she said; "you would have done better for him. But as it was I he wanted, I must do my best, and I will go to Brighton."

Then slowly, with bent head, she left the room.

The baby's godmother sat lost in thought for many minutes. It had cost her much to say what she had said, and she felt doubtful how long the impression she had made would endure. Each heart must pass through the furnace for itself. To hear of the refining of others, has no lasting effect on the heart's own alloy.

She knew this, and her thoughts followed Flower anxiously. At length she rose, and stood leaning her elbow

upon the mantelpiece and looking long at an old miniature of the doctor, placed there among Flower's special treasures; but the doctor before Flower knew him, the doctor as he was in years gone by, when he and the baby's godmother were faithful chums, and she was his trusted confidante and the sharer of all his hopes and ambitions. So she stood looking into the bright, dark eyes of a very young man, a man with all the best of life before him, full of a noble courage, an unfaltering faith in his ideals, an intellect which should carry him anywhere he willed to go. A smile of conscious power curved the lips. There was no hint of weariness about the keen, clear eyes.

The baby's godmother took it up and laid it in the palm of her large hand. Then she spoke to it softly.

"Oh, Boy!" she said, "oh, Boy! I have done my best for you. I would always have given you all I had to give. But you wanted loveliness and I could only give you love. You have the loveliness and now you are sighing for the love. God send you that, my dear—my dear. Oh, Boy! I have done what I could."

She put the portrait down and turned away as the door opened suddenly to admit the doctor's wife, breathless.

"Jane, such a nuisance! Madame Celestine has arrived. I entirely forgot the appointment. My gown for the next Drawing-room, the final fitting—oh, such a dream! Come up and see, and help and advise. You old darling, what a blessing to have you here! I never *can* be firm with Celestine."

The luncheon gong had sounded punctually as the clock struck one. The baby's godmother had waited, restlessly, ten minutes, and then received a message not to wait, Mrs. Brand would be down from the workroom shortly.

Tailor-made, booted, and hatted, ready for her journey into Norfolk, Jane helped herself to cold chicken and salad, and kept her eye on the clock, remembering "two sharp."

"If she comes down quite ready she can do it," thought the baby's godmother, and turned her healthy attention to apple-tart and custard.

The door opened and the doctor's wife trailed in, in a teagown.

"Dear Jane, I apologize. But I knew my absence would not impair your appetite, and you should not have

left me until that good creature had gone. The restraint of your presence removed, she launched out into fresh suggestions, and wheedled me into having a gown for the Devonshire's big squash, though I had meant to go in my Paquin. How beautifully you carve, my dear, or did old Stoddart do it for you? This fowl looks as if it had been handled by a man and an expert. Now, I fear, I am going to make it look as if it had crossed the road in front of a motor-car. What on earth are you gazing at? 'My pretty Jane, my dearest Jane, oh, never look so shy!'" trilled the doctor's wife. "Is anything wrong with the custard?"

"Flower! How are you to be ready at 2 sharp, when here it is 1.45 and you in that flimsy teagown?"

"My dear, I am not going. It is always wisest to adhere to first plans. I should *love* to go, but I could not possibly be ready now, and I cannot feel it right to leave the children when nurse—"

The door opened quickly and the doctor came in.

"Dearest," cried Flower, "Lunch after all? If only I had known you were coming I would have saved a wing—"

"No," said the doctor, brightly, "no time for lunch to-day, and I hardly ought to have come upstairs. I have one more patient to see, and my hansom is at the door. But I wanted to say good-bye, dear, and also to say—" he dropped his voice slightly— "don't worry about not having been able to come. It was

selfish of me to ask it of you, Flower. And then I remembered, too, Jeanette was going home to-day, so I ran up to bid her good-bye, a longer farewell than ours."

He went round the table and held out his hand to the baby's godmother.

"Good-bye, Jeanette. My love to all at home. Look us up again when you can. And thank you for all your loving-kindness to me and mine."

The baby's godmother rose, and her hand went firmly home to his. Their eyes were almost on a level as they stood together.

"Good-bye, Boy," she said. "Don't overwork. Rest whenever possible. And remember, you and yours are always dear to me. Let me do all I can."

A half-puzzled, half-pleased look

leaped into his eyes at sound of the old name. It was many years since she had used it. He held her hand and looked at her with steady scrutiny for a moment. She met his gaze full and clear. She had nothing to hide.

"Good-bye, dear," said the doctor, then turned to his wife, and hesitated.

"Good-bye, Flower," he said, rather wistfully.

Flower objected to any demonstration in public. She waved her napkin.

"Good-bye, my lord," she said, "and while you are gallivanting about at Brighton, please remember your poor, little domesticated wife staying at home to tend house and children."

The door closed sharply behind the

doctor. The baby's godmother bent over her plate in silence. The doctor's wife laughed, moved round the table to cut a slice of cake, laughed again, rather mirthlessly, then reiterated all the reasons why it was unreasonable of Deryck to have asked her to go to Brighton, and of Jane to have made such a point of her acquiescing, concluding with, "And why do you call him 'Boy'? Such a silly, inappropriate name! And, oh, I wish I had gone! I hear his hansom. What a hateful world!"

* * * * *

Eight o'clock in the evening.

The soft, green curtains were drawn in Flower's boudoir, shutting out the chill of the spring night air. The electric light, shining through water-lilies, gleamed, soft and bright,

from walls and writing-table. Flower had turned on every spray, hoping to lighten with exterior brightness the heavy shadow of disappointment and foreboding which had fallen upon her heart.

Since the doctor's hansom had tinkled rapidly away towards Victoria, all had gone wrong with the doctor's wife.

The baby's godmother, who had had so much to say in the morning, became absolutely monosyllabic, and conversation languished and died.

It was a relief to see her depart, with her neat, gentlemanly luggage, for Liverpool Street Station, and yet it seemed desolate without her, and the klip-klop of her rapidly receding hansom made a second sound to be added to the series of knells which

should ring in Flower's heart that day.

Turning from the hall-door, she ran up to the nursery, to find out at what hour nurse wished to be free for her outing, and found it was to-morrow for which nurse had asked, not to-day. Nurse was quite sure she had said Wednesday; how could she have said Tuesday, when the married niece to whom she was going always went out to tea on Tuesdays with her mother-in-law in Pimlico? But, of course, Master Deryck *was* hammering at the time, which may have accounted for his mamma not rightly catching the day. Emma came forward, a ready witness to the fact that nurse had most certainly said Wednesday, and stuck to her guns, in spite of Dicky's quiet little voice asserting

gravely from the position he had taken up at his mother's side, "*You* had gone down for the milk."

So the doctor's wife retreated in discomfiture and trailed slowly downstairs, facing the fact that the one reason which had seemed an insuperable obstacle to her falling in with her husband's wish and plan, had been a mistake; a stupid, careless mistake.

What would Jane say if she knew?

The tersely expressed remark with which Jane would most likely define the situation came into her mind, and she smiled a wan little smile, for the doctor's wife possessed "the saving sense of humor."

Then she felt more cheerful, rang and ordered the motor, and dressed for a spin in the park. But everything spoke of Brighton and the en-

joyment she might have had with the doctor on this lovely day.

The sun was almost warm, and there was a pursuing scent of violets in the air. The crocuses were shouting to the sparrows, and the many-colored hyacinths pushed their bright heads up through the brown earth, obedient to the beckoning of the sunshine. The whole park sang of springtime, of life and love and joys to come. And she longed for him beside her, with his keen enjoyment, with his quick way of pointing out a fresh beauty which she might otherwise have overlooked, with his knack of making you feel that you were alive, and living every minute to the full, receiving all it had to give, and, above all, with the ever-kindling adoration of his love wrapping her round

and making her feel herself to be good and beautiful and worthy.

This afternoon she sadly needed reinstating in her own esteem. She knew she was being unjust to herself, but she felt selfish and inadequate and unworthy of him and of his love. It was Jane who had given her this uncomfortable feeling. It was odious of Jane to call him "Boy" and to pretend to understand his needs better than she, his own wife, did. Oh, if only she had gone to Brighton! If only she had gone! But it was not *her* fault that she had been unable to fall in with the plan at so short notice. Deryck himself had admitted that it was he who was to blame, and she was not to worry. It was all very well for men to tell poor, anxious women not to worry. He might have known she

would be wondering all the rest of the day how he was faring at Brighton, whether he was too tired to eat and too tired to sleep. If only horrid old celebrities would die at once when they fell ill, instead of causing all this fuss and trouble. . . . It would be a great pity to be too tired to eat at the Metropole, where the table d'hôte dinner was so perfect. . . . It was trying of Deryck to rush off with only a packet of sandwiches in his bag, when, by taking five minutes more from his tiresome patients, he might have had the wing of a chicken and some salad. . . . What a good lunch Jane had made! If she had *really* been so troubled at the thought of Deryck going off alone she would hardly have hurried into the dining-room the moment the gong sounded

and given her mind so completely to her food. Jane was the sort of person who enjoyed putting other people in the wrong. So different to Deryck, who saw at once where the blame really belonged and never laid it upon others. Which was it most right to believe—Deryck or Jane? Deryck, of course. Then why feel condemned any longer? . . . How lovely it would have been at Brighton! A *selfish* person would have gone at once and not have been so considerate for tiresome old nurse with her changeable plans. People who change their plans without any adequate reason do not deserve much consideration. If she had been a less devoted mother— How sweet it was of Dicky to point out that Emma had gone down for the milk! So like Deryck,

who never would allow her to be unjustly put in the wrong. It was wonderful to be so loved by two such natures, father and son. A woman who was selfish or unworthy could never have drawn out such love. Jane was not in the least likely ever to marry. How disgusting of her to speak so approvingly of married women who ran after Deryck. Perhaps, after all, one of those creatures would happen to be at the Metropole this evening and would insist upon dining with him at a table for two.

Another wan little smile flitted across Flower's face. The dimple the doctor loved peeped out. She knew so exactly how he would feel and look, and how he would describe the whole occurrence to her afterwards, giving her unconsciously the

gratifying certainty that in her absence no other woman could by any possibility usurp her place.

The gliding motion of the car made her drowsy. She leaned back with closed eyes, enjoying the sensation of speeding forward, trusting to the deft vigilance of her chauffeur, not even seeing for herself the possible collisions avoided, the rapid half-turn which meant gliding from danger into safety.

The roar of traffic on the distant thoroughfare sounded like the breaking of the waves on the beach at Brighton. She fancied herself driving along the King's Road, alighting at the Metropole and meeting Deryck, to whom she would say, "Dearest, I came after all."

The sudden slowing of the car

aroused her. They were held up for a moment in a cross-stream of carriages near the main gate. She opened her eyes and they fell upon a man and woman close by, sitting side by side in a victoria. The woman had a spray of white roses on her muff. Her companion bent towards her with a whispered word. She instantly detached a milk-white bud from the rest and handed it to him. Her look of blissful, submissive love as she did this, reached to the motor as an enlightening beam. The man took the rose and fastened it carefully in his button-hole without any expressed thanks, but, as he leaned back in the carriage beside her, his look of restful and masterful possession of herself and all she possessed seemed fully to content the woman. Her

eyes and lips smiled tenderly, and lifting the white roses she laid them for a moment against her cheek.

"Home," said the doctor's wife, suddenly; and as the car turned obediently and sped out at the gate the voice of the baby's godmother seemed to pursue her relentlessly: "*Give Deryck his white rose while he asks it of you. A man requires the instant fulfilment of his heart's desires. When he needs a thing, he needs it* NOW!"

Ah, Jeanette, you were very faithful, and you did what you could.

* * * * *

Arrived at home, the doctor's wife had tea in company with one or two choice spirits who dropped in to discuss the reception at Myra Ingleby's and the coming big affair at the Dev-

onshire's, and much interest was aroused by the fact that the doctor's wife was *not* going in her Paquin, but was to have an absolutely new creation by that clever old dear, Celestine.

After all, Jane, with her attention fixed upon apple-tart and her mind so completely, blankly unsympathetic, was enough to depress anybody. Deryck would be the first to be indignant, if he knew what Jane had said.

Her visitors gone, she rang for the children, and the promised game of menagerie began, though their small minds had leaped to something else, which they assured her they would like much better. But she insisted on the menagerie, rapidly pulling all the stuffed animals out of the toy cup-

board and hurrying them into the middle of the room. She felt unable to endure that no part of the programme she had explained to Deryck should take place, and for many years to come the children used to speak between themselves of menageries as "mother's favorite game."

All went well for a time. She enjoyed sitting on the soft carpet, with Blossom rolling over her, a creamy billow of cashmere and lace, and small Deryck in his black velvet suit, with his neat little black silk legs and buckled shoes, gravely marshalling the animals and explaining the mental condition of each, their relation to one another, and their past and present experiences.

But by and by he began asking awkward questions about Noah's Ark

and would not be put off with evasive answers. The doctor's wife felt helpless. She knew little of animals, less of ships, and nothing whatever of ancient preachers of righteousness. A complete and comprehensive knowledge of all three would have been required to have satisfactorily answered Dicky's questions. So, harassed and worried, she entrenched herself hastily in what appeared to be an impregnable position.

"My dear little boy, how can I possibly tell? *I was not there.*"

Deryck, the younger, was arranging that a bear who could only sit—who had been born sitting and stiffened in that position—should ride, in the procession, on the wide back of an elephant.

But he stopped the procession at

this, set the bear down, and came and stood opposite his mother, surveying her gravely, with his hands deep in the pockets of his velvet breeches. She sat on the floor beside the sofa, her lovely head thrown back against a cushion, looking up at him with eyes full of love and almost wistful tenderness.

His little face at first was rather hard and stern, but, as he looked at her, it softened. Her ignorance of Noah's domestic arrangements seemed to matter less. She was so lovely that it seemed unreasonable to expect her to be other things!

"You are not much use at answering questions, darling, are you?" he said gravely. "I must let the point stand over until father comes home. You see, you never seem to know

"YOU ARE NOT MUCH USE AT ANSWERING QUESTIONS, DARLING, ARE YOU?"

about anything you have not done yourself."

"Dicky, you are not kind to poor mummie," protested Flower, piteously. "No one could *possibly* know what Noah did to the animals in the Ark when the large ones trod upon the small ones, or how the elephant was kept from stepping on the grasshopper."

"An average person would know," Dicky insisted coldly.

"Dicky, you are most unkind! You imply that I am stupid."

"I am afraid you are, darling," said the quiet little voice, and then, in a sudden burst of admiration, "But you are *much* too lovely for it to matter." And the miniature edition of the doctor fell upon her and clasped her in his arms.

"We must say our text to you, mother, as father is away," Dicky remarked a few minutes later, when bedtime came.

Flower assented without enthusiasm. She did not approve of nurse's plan of teaching the children a daily text, and always wondered why Deryck encouraged it. But she did not wish again to present herself to her little son's mind in a disappointing light.

Dicky arranged Baby Blossom "in a row" with himself. She immediately began to say, "Do it—do it!" and had to be sternly hushed by her brother. Then, with his hands behind him and his head erect, Dicky announced impressively:

"Jesus said: 'If you shall ask anythink in my name, I will'—now, baby—"

"Do it!" chirped Baby Blossom.

"Very nice," commented Flower, perfunctorily.

Baby Blossom, her duty done, took a header into the soft sofa-cushion, shrieking with delight and waving her plump little legs in the air. Deryck, though deserted, kept his place in the "row." He had not yet finished with the text.

"Do you consider it true, mother?" he questioned, and his dark eyes searched her face.

"Why—well—yes, dear, I suppose so," answered Flower, vaguely. "Baby, take care! You will break your neck!"

"What does 'anythink' mean?" inquired Dicky.

"You should not say '*anythink*'; it is any*thing*."

"It is any*think* in nurse's Bible,"

asserted Dicky, "and I suppose it means all that comes into your head. Anything you can think of."

"I believe," said Flower, with a sudden inspiration, "that it merely refers to the religious experience of the apostles."

"Goodness," said Dicky, in nurse's best manner when arguing with Marsdon, "then why don't it say so?" Adding, almost immediately, in his own quiet, rather sad, little voice, "And what good is it to us then, mummie?"

"None whatever," replied Flower, with decision, rising from the floor and hugging baby. She felt she was scoring now and reasserting her mental superiority. "That is why I object to people teaching such words to children," she remarked from among Blossom's curls.

The small Deryck was silent. He stood very erect and gave a sharp pull to the front of his little white waistcoat, swallowing hard, as if something had hurt him. Flower felt slightly uncomfortable at being thus suddenly left with the last word. Dicky was so very masculine, and she was not at all sure of her own theology.

The silence, growing strained, was relieved by the advent of nurse, who carried off Baby Blossom and bade Dicky make haste and say good-night to his mamma and come along. He turned to her gravely. "Good-night, mother," he said.

Flower embraced him effusively and suggested a visit to the Zoo, now the warm weather was coming. Dicky allowed himself to be kissed, but ignored the remark about the Zoo.

When he reached the door he turned and looked back bravely.

"Mother," he said, "I don't know about the 'postles, but I think I ought to tell you that I have made that text my *h*own. Nurse says you can always make a text your *h*own if it meets your need. I feel this meets my need!"

He held his head bravely, though flinching a little, as if dreading his mother's scorn or laughter.

But Flower did not laugh. She looked across the room at the brave little figure, in blank astonishment. The sincerity of his convictions reached and convinced her. But what an ignorant old Puritan nurse must be! At last she smiled at Dicky, reassuringly.

"That may be true, darling. But

my dear little boy, you haven't any 'needs.'"

"Oh, haven't I!" said Dicky, as one who would say, "That is all *you* know!" Then taking hold of the outer handle he drew the door slowly behind him, turning, before it quite closed, to fling back over his shoulder, "I need an entirely new inside to my rabbit."

Left alone another remark of Dicky's returned to Flower's mind and added to her despondency.

"You never seem to know about anything you have not done yourself," her little son had said, and this assertion let in a sudden light of revelation upon her whole mental standpoint. How true it was, how sickeningly, horribly true!

What did she know of Deryck's

work? Of all the people who came and went in the rooms below? Of the lectures he gave, or the essays he wrote, eagerly attended, eagerly read by hundreds? What share had she in the great interests of her husband's life? Jane had tried to speak of them more than once, and she had changed the subject.

And sitting there, deeply convicted by the grave little voice of her own tiny boy, she remembered times when Deryck had tried to talk to her of these questions so near his heart—of the methods he had thought out for curing diseased or weakened wills, for restoring shattered nerves and unbalanced brains, for giving a new lease of sane and healthy life to those who now walked fettered in the valley of a shadow worse than death. And she

had taken no interest, had not tried to understand, had listened without hearing, and, at the first opportunity, talked of her own trivial doings. Was not an intelligent sympathy with his work, one of the white roses for which Deryck well might ask?

Slowly she passed to her bedroom and dressed for the evening's function, wishing all the while that she need not go, and partook of an early dinner alone, with her thoughts far away. Now it was eight o'clock, and she sat in her boudoir waiting until it should be time to be whirled through the noisy, lighted streets, to join the gay throng at Myra's crush.

Oh, how different to have walked on the pier with him, nestling into her furs, enjoying the cold night air and salty smell of brine and seaweed!

And then to have returned to their warm, bright room, Deryck, pleased as any schoolboy, to have her away without her maid, amusing her by his delightful attempts to take Marsdon's place and assist at her toilet.

The fire, which had received so much unconscious attention from the baby's godmother that morning, fell together in the grate, signifying its need of coal. The doctor's wife rose and ministered to it, then knelt on the hearthrug and watched the brightening flame. Her mind had gone forward in its contemplation of that evening which might have been. Her eyes were soft and tender. Her sweet lips parted gently. Her hair gleamed golden in the firelight.

How wonderful was his love! Jane was right when she said, "He

will always be a boy where he loves. He is so young in heart, so eternally, passionately young." How did Jane guess it? Only she, his wife, could *know* it to be true.

Seven years of married life had only added to the wonder and romance of Deryck's love. Each time he took her away with him was like a fresh honeymoon, more perfect than the last. Why did she forget when she came home, how sweet it was to be away with him? Why had she defrauded herself and him of the perfect hours which might have been theirs this day? Why had she failed him in his time of need?

Oh, selfish! shallow! self-absorbed! Loving to *be* loved, not rising to the joy of loving. Taking his care and thought and adoration as her due, giv-

ing no tender service in return. She bowed her head upon her arms.

"Oh, Boy," she said, "not Jane's, but *mine!* Oh, Boy, it shall be different! You will come back to find a wife who understands, a wife whose hands are filled with roses white, ready to give them now."

The doorbell sounded. She rose and wrapped her cloak about her. She had little inclination for Myra's party, but he would be thinking of her there, and anywhere would do to pass the hours till his return.

Stoddart brought in a telegram, retired softly, and closed the door. She looked at it with a sudden thrill of comprehending joy. A good-night message from Deryck? He nearly always sent her one. Ah, if she had

remembered to do the same for him! She glanced at the clock. Twenty minutes past eight. Too late to get one through.

She slipped off her cloak and sank into an easy-chair, holding the unopened message in her hand. She wished to realize to the full the newness of what it meant to receive words from him. Then, when her heart was ready, she opened the orange envelope gently and drew out the folded paper.

It seemed a long message. She read it through once. She read it through again. Then she sat quite still and listened to the ticking of the clock. Then she looked at it again and heard a frightened voice, not unlike her own, reading it aloud:

From the Commissioner of Police, Brighton.

Regret to announce Dr. Deryck Brand knocked down by motor-car corner King's Road. Killed instantly. Wire instructions.

She rose and walked to the door. It opened as she reached it, and Stoddart stood there saying the brougham waited. She waved him aside.

"I shall not want it to-night, thank you."

Passing into her room, she closed the door. The electric light over her dressing-table shone brightly. She switched it off. Then, in the utter darkness, she felt her way to the empty bed, his bed and hers, laid down the telegram upon it, and stood quite still.

"O God," she whispered, "help

me to think. . . . I am not clever. My little boy thinks me stupid, and my big boy thinks me lovely; but Thou knowest my loveliness seems to me but filthy rags. But now, in my hour of need, oh, merciful God, let me think! There is something I want to remember. Ah!" she almost shrieked, "the wheels of time! the wheels of time! Never move backwards, they say; always forwards—always forwards. And that is why it is too late. O God, too late, too late! My roses ready—ready for him; but too late. . . . What did the children say: 'If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.' And Dicky says anything means anything we need. God in heaven! I need the wheels of time to move back six hours, that I may go with him."

She flung herself upon her knees beside the bed.

"O God, O God, in Jesus' name, put back the wheels of time, that I may go with him!"

She shrieked, then crammed the quilt into her mouth, lest they should hear and find her there.

"O God, O God—in Jesus' name —the wheels of time—back—back— that I may go with him!"

She tore down her lovely hair and wound it round her hands. The pain kept her from swooning, helped her to think.

"O God in heaven, in Jesus' name —put back the wheels of time—that I may go with him. If ye shall ask *anything*—'anything' *means* anything, Dicky; not mere religious experiences, but anything we want. O

God, I want another chance! Back —back—that I may go with him!"

Then she knelt very still, deathly still, while her heart thundered in her ears and the room rocked to and fro. But she clung to the bedclothes and knelt on.

The street door banged. She heard a step come up the stairs.

She cried again: "O God, O God —the wheels of time—back—back!"

The door opened and closed. Someone stood just within, breathing quickly, listening intently.

Then the doctor's voice said: "In the dark, my darling? Why, what is the matter?" And the room flashed into light.

"O God," she said, "O God! The wheels of time—turned back—that I —may go—with him!"

His arms were round her, he had lifted her bodily and placed her on the bed. His face was shocked and startled. He unwound the lovely hair from the clenched hands and noted how much of it fell away in scattered wisps to the floor. He wiped the blood from those sweet lips, bitten through. Then he knelt down, gathered her to his heart, and spoke very gently.

"Flower, my Flower! Something has frightened you. You have had a shock. But it is all right, now, my heart's dearest. I have come back to you. Listen, beloved. I was so pleased, because I got through the consultation earlier than I thought, and found, if I made a dash for it, I could just catch the fast train up. I dined on board—listen, Flower! Don't keep

on whispering, child. Never mind the wheels of time. Listen to me! I meant to hurry home and dress, and give you a surprise by turning up at Myra's. But then I felt too chilled, and determined I must stay at home and have a brew of gruel. Some other chap, in a hurry—a doctor who left before me—went off with my overcoat, and I had to turn out without one. No time to make inquiries. Such a cold fellow has come back to his little girl. Won't she see about warming him?"

The gay voice ceased. The set face bent over her. The quick professional eye noted each rigid muscle of that poor agonized face. He laid his lips on hers, with one broken sob.

"Oh, my beloved! For God's sake—"

Then Flower lifted up her hand and pointed to the foot of the bed. He looked and saw the open telegram. Reaching with one long arm, he took it up and read it.

"Good heavens!" he said. "Run down and killed! The poor chap who took my coat. My pocketbook was in it, and a bundle of letters." Then he bent over his wife once more, and whispered in a tone of awed wonder:

"Oh, Flower! *You cared like this?*"

And the wonder in his voice, the almost boyish surprise, saved Flower.

She turned her face to his breast and wept and wept; wept herself to calmness, and sobbed herself back into the haven of his love, the earthly Paradise of her heart's peace.

"OH, FLOWER! YOU CARED LIKE THIS?"

When at last she found speech possible, she said, "If I had gone—"

"Hush, my perfect one," the doctor said. "You were quite right."

But she laid her hand over his mouth, with a swift, silencing gesture, then took his hand and kissed it, with infinite humility and tenderness.

"Deryck," she said, "it is *your* love which has been perfect. I have been quite wrong. But God in His infinite mercy has heard my prayer and given me another chance. Oh, my beloved, I have but a poor white rose to offer you—a crushed and faded thing; but it is all your own. Give me another chance—oh, Deryck—a chance to *serve*. It is all I ask, it is all I want—to serve; because now, indeed, I truly love."

Then the doctor knew that at last

life held for him all that his heart had craved through hungry years.

"Mary," he said, "oh, Mary!"

He dropped his head upon her breast, in sudden silence, and her white hands, like roses, clasped it softly, and lay upon the darkness of his hair.

134
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